HE PROMISED TO CONTINUE PROVIDING MY NEEDS: TRANSACTIONAL FIRST SEX AMONG FEMALE ADOLESCENTS IN CAPE COAST, GHANA.

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Transactional sex has become one of the major sexual risk behaviours contributing to the spread of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. The sexual and reproductive health implications are exacerbated when transactional sex occurs among adolescents, particularly those engaging in sexual intercourse for the first time. While transactional sex is commonly understood to be practiced as a survival strategy for economically disadvantaged young women, the phenomenon has not been adequately explored among adolescent girls initiating sex. This paper contributes to the subject by bringing to bear the perspectives of female adolescents whose first sexual intercourse can best be described as transactional in nature. Relying of convenient and purposive sampling procedures, in-depth interviews were conducted among 11 female adolescent girls aged 15-19 attending a Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG) clinic in Cape Coast, Ghana. Their narratives suggest that although several of these girls were motivated by economic forces, these economic motivations go beyond survival to developing feelings of love and anticipations for marriage. In instances where sex was not given in return for the gifts and money, some of these girls were forced or drugged into engaging in sexual intercourse by their partners. Although the partners these adolescent girls engaged with were slightly older and had previous sexual partners, negotiating condom use was often not an option in such sexual encounters. The findings highlight the various contexts in which first sex occurs during the period of adolescence, and the implications for sexual and reproductive health interventions.